

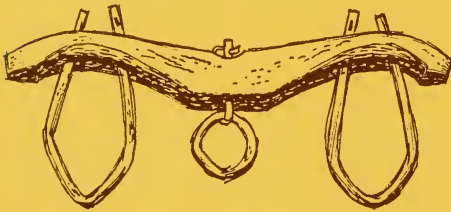
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Abraham Lincoln on the
Niagara Frontier

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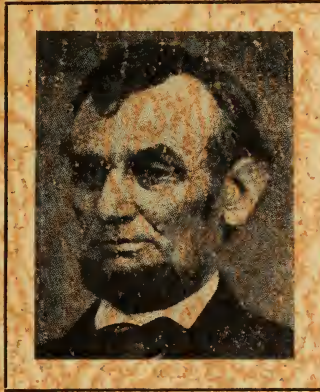
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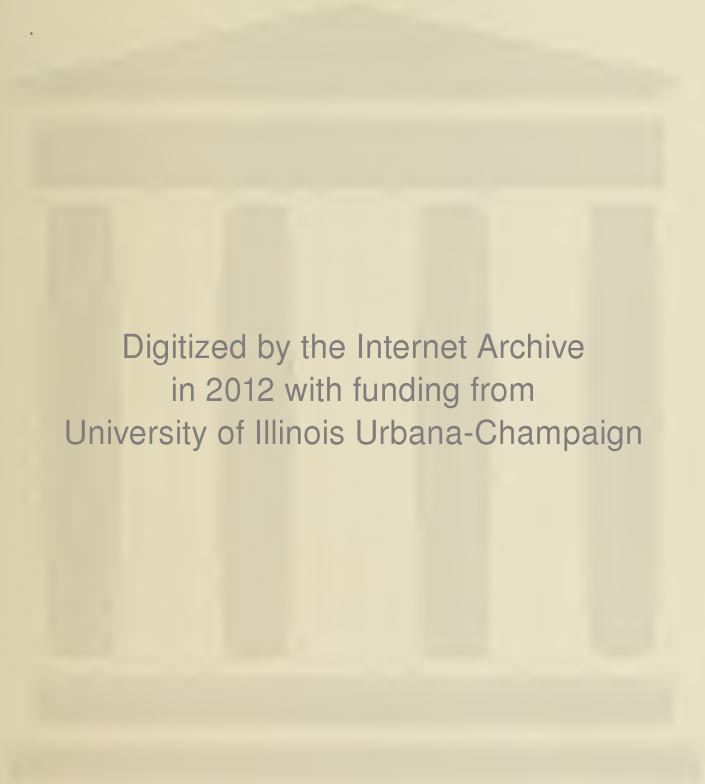




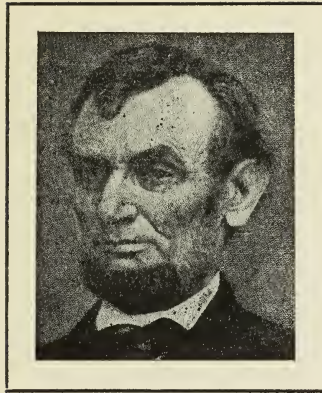
ABRAHAM LINCOLN
on the
NIAGARA FRONTIER

*"With malice toward none,
With charity for all."*

BY
JULIA GATES GREENE



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ABRAHAM LINCOLN
on the
NIAGARA FRONTIER



*"With malice toward none,
With charity for all."*

*“I will study and be ready,
Then maybe the chance will come.”*

—LINCOLN

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
ON THE NIAGARA FRONTIER

IN the year 1814, there was erected at Niagara Falls, New York, a fine hotel, then called the Eagle Tavern; but later the name was changed, and now is, The Cataract House.

This was before the railroads there, or the Erie Canal had been constructed. It is the finest located hotel in the city, looking out on Prospect Park and the Niagara Rapids, just above the American Falls, which plunge to a depth of one hundred sixty-four feet.

This hotel is a four story structure, painted white with green trim, and has one frontage of two hundred sixty-two feet on Main Street and another, overlooking the river. Most of the walls are of solid masonry, some two feet thick.

In the earliest days of its existence, visitors came down the Niagara River in boats, as far as seemed safe, then continued the journey by tallyho and drove up to the door of the Cataract House, with horns blowing and horses prancing. Some of these passengers were men in high hats and top coats and ladies in fancy dresses. These were the days when much of the wealth of the country was in the hands of Southern planters and there may be found on the hotel registers, of pre-Civil war days, names from Richmond, Va., Natchez, Miss., New Orleans and other Southern cities. These men arrived with their families and retinues of slaves, quarters for the latter being provided in the half basement.

THE present management possesses registers dating back to 1825 and they contain the names of many notables. The name of nearly every President of the United States is there, including Grant, Fillmore, Cleveland, McKinley and Roosevelt. There are also the names of Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Li Hung Chang, General Howard, Chauncey M. Depew, John D. Rockefeller and family, the late King Edward VII, then Prince of Wales and of members of most of the royal families of the world, who have found food and rest within these walls.

Some of these registrations are very odd and ludicrous, having besides the name and address of the guest, some added information. Frequently the individual's politics was stated; the word Whig occurs after many names registered in the fifties.

In the register of 1842, there appears this entry on September 8th: "Rev. I. I. Taylor, wife, 26 children and six servants. Will preach next Sunday at the Indian village", which was Chippewa, ten miles from the Cataract House.

Another item in one of the oldest registers reads as follows: "J. Prynne, New York City: O. K. Was caught in a draw bridge; but escaped with my life".

One of the registers is specially preserved in a safe and on one of its pages there may be read, this line under date of July 24, 1857: "A. Lincoln and Family, Springfield, Ill." This family spent that night here and walked through these very halls, having come to view the Falls. The family then included Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln, Robert, aged fourteen, Willie, seven and Tad four. Mr. Lincoln

was then forty-eight years of age and was just entering upon his campaign for the United States senatorship. In the following summer, 1858, the famous debates took place between Abraham Lincoln, the "rail-splitter" and Stephen A. Douglas, the "Little Giant".

THREE years after this visit to Niagara Falls, Mr. Lincoln was elected President of the United States, in 1860, at the age of fifty-one, and was inaugurated about one month before the opening of the Civil War.

If Mr. Lincoln were to drive up to the Cataract House today, seventy-three years after his first visit, he would easily recognize the house; for, although it had in the course of its one hundred and fourteen years' existence, become somewhat out of repair, the property passed into new ownership within a few years and has been completely renovated and restored to its earliest appearance, even being painted, the same as over a hundred years ago, white with green trim. Even the old time signs have been restored, with the same lettering.

Mr. Lincoln would recognize the spacious verandah along the two hundred and sixty-two foot frontage as well as the inviting porches on the river side of the house. Upon entering the inviting lobby, he would find upon the wall, a portrait of himself, as he appeared when President. Were he to enter one of the guest rooms, first opening the old-time green shutter, then the door proper, he might recognize the heavy mahogany, walnut or rosewood furniture, upholstered anew, but with design unchanged. He might be puzzled, but pleased, with the immaculate bathroom, as the two hundred and twenty-five rooms in the

house all now have water; many of them have baths.

THE telephone standing on the clear, white marble of the dresser would be without meaning to him, as would also the steam radiator in the corner of the room. Were he to step to the window and look out, he would have the same beautiful view of Prospect Park and the Niagara Rapids. Were he to walk through the spacious parlors and the immense ball room, with its antique chandeliers, he would find that the Colonial and Mid-Victorian atmosphere of the house has been preserved by the use of much of the original antique furniture. Many a fine piece of mahogany and rosewood has been brought forth from the storeroom and other parts of the old Cataract House, and put into use after thorough refinishing. The furnishings are in keeping with the traditions of the house. Through the graciousness of the manager, guests are permitted to read Mr. Lincoln's registration, written by his own hand. The present management, particularly Mr. John F. McDonald, of Buffalo, New York, owner, and Mr. Lawrence J. White of Niagara Falls, Directing Manager, deserve great credit for having made it possible for the public to re-live those scenes of more than a century ago under such original conditions, with the addition of those modern conveniences which are so much to be desired.

They have succeeded, with an expenditure of several hundred thousand dollars, in preserving and rejuvenating, in a natural way, one of the best known American landmarks. They have shown how a hotel one hundred and fourteen years old was brought up to date without the loss of its early atmosphere.

THEIR slogan for the house is, "As famous as the Falls".

Mr. Lincoln's second visit to the Niagara Frontier occurred when he with his family and party were en route from Springfield, Ill., to Washington, D. C., for his first inauguration as President. He was the man who went from

Canoe to special train;
Rail-splitter to President;
Log cabin to White House
In thirty years. .

Of course, everyone was anxious to see the President-elect, and a few stops were made en route.

Buffalo, New York, was one of the favored cities. The Presidential party arrived in Buffalo, Saturday P. M., February 16, 1861 and remained over the week end. Both the President and Mrs. Lincoln were given a reception in the afternoon in the American Hotel which stood on Main Street near Court Street. The President stood in the main hall for three hours greeting the people, while Mrs. Lincoln received in the parlor.

In the evening, the President spoke from the hotel balcony. While in the city, they were the guests of former President and Mrs. Millard Fillmore. They attended the First Unitarian Church with their host and his wife on Sunday, and proceeded on their journey Monday morning. We had a description of the reception by one who attended it. Lieutenant Colonel Albert H. Briggs, then a youth, well remembered the event. He had succeeded in getting near the President when an officer was about to interfere. Mr. Lincoln saw

the proceeding and called out "Leave that boy alone", and reaching out his long arm, warmly greeted the lad.

WERE Mr. Lincoln to repeat today his visit to Buffalo of 1861 he would find many changes in the sixty-nine years which have elapsed. He would find the site of the American Hotel on Main near Court Street now occupied by the Adam, Meldrum & Anderson Department Store. This hotel was burned June 24, 1865, with a loss of the lives of three firemen. *Jan*

The Fillmore residence, on Niagara Square, afterwards called Castle Inn, where he was entertained, is no more and in its place stands the Hotel Statler.

The First Unitarian Church which he attended still stands at the northwest corner of Franklin and Eagle Streets, with such alterations as have been necessary to make it suitable to be the home of the Abstract, Title & Mortgage Corporation. When the President and his host, the former president, came out of the church, if they had looked upon the block just across Eagle Street, they would have seen, standing on the Franklin Street side, the old city buildings, and on the Delaware Avenue side, a cemetery. This block was later called Franklin Square. Later on, these old city buildings and the cemetery were removed to make way for the fine stone structure, erected there in 1877, as Buffalo's City and County Hall, which is now the Erie County Building.

A new seven and a half million dollar city hall is being erected on Niagara Square. This structure covers the site of the last public execution in Buffalo. Here, on June 7, 1825, the three Thayer

brothers were hung for the murder of John Love, a few miles out of Buffalo. It was estimated that thirty thousand people witnessed the event, having gathered there from all the adjoining countryside, even some coming from Canada.

THE Reverend Glezen Fillmore, uncle of former President Millard Fillmore had ministered to the young criminals - whose ages ranged from nineteen to twenty-three-, and as soon as they were pronounced dead, he, with a powerful voice, arose and preached a vigorous sermon to that vast multitude.

At the time of Mr. Lincoln's Buffalo visit in 1861, the city's population was about 81,000. Only three street car lines were in operation—Main, Niagara and Genesee. The cars were drawn by horses or mules and stopped anywhere on signal from the incoming or outgoing passengers. The northern terminal of the Main Street line was at Main and Ferry Streets. That section was called "Cold Springs" named from the springs located on the southeast corner and surrounded by brick masonry four feet high and about fifteen feet in diameter. The Gerry Marshall Hotel occupied part of the same plot with the springs; and was a stopping place for the stages running between Clarence, Williamsville and Buffalo. Where there were any street pavements, they were of stone or planks. The streets were lighted by oil lamps; gas was just coming in.

The first grain elevator in the world had been erected in Buffalo eighteen years before in 1843. Ellicott Square had not been thought of.

For a third time the Niagara Frontier was greatly honored but not that time by the presence of the living Lincoln.

THE Civil War had ended. Lee's surrender had occurred on April 9, 1865. The Union was preserved; slavery was abolished and the heavy load was lifted from the great, tired soul of Abraham Lincoln. There was great rejoicing in the land but never before was rejoicing turned into such sudden and overwhelming sorrow.

We are all familiar with the facts about that dreadful happening in Ford's Theatre in Washington, D. C., in the evening of April 14, 1865, and that in the morning of April 15, 1865, the tolling of the bells announced that our Commander-in-Chief had joined the hosts of his boys in blue who had gone on before him. This occurred only five days after the ending of the war.

After appropriate services in Washington, that unparalleled funereal procession started—winding along a track of fifteen hundred miles, carrying the revered dead back to his own people, to the scenes of his early life; back to the prairies of Illinois.

On that trip from Washington to Springfield, stops were made in some cities and Buffalo, New York, was again favored. The body lay in state for one day, April 27, 1865, in St. James Hall at Eagle and Washington Streets, and the citizens were permitted to look upon the face of their beloved President.

On March 18, 1887, St. James Hall, then occupied by Bunnell's Museum, was burned, also its neighboring building at Main and Eagle Streets, the Richmond Hotel. In this fire there was the dreadful loss of twenty-two lives. From the ruins of these structures, there arose the Iroquois Hotel, which in recent years became an office building, and was named the Gerrans Building.

IN this brief article, simply considering the relations of Mr. Lincoln with the Niagara Frontier, we cannot include any of the innumerable eulogies which were uttered at the time of his passing, but will quote a few lines by Mrs. Mary E. W. Robertson of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, near Mr. Lincoln's birthplace:

*In old Kentucky where the grass grows green,
An old log cabin may yet be seen,
It sheltered a life that Fate had decreed
Should come at the call of the Country's need.
By the light of the fire, in the twilight hour,
The lad wove his dreams, asking God for power.
His soul longed for wisdom and drank in rich lore,
Till his mind was filled with a wondrous store.
God called for a man when the bravest might shrink;
The Good Ship of State seemed ready to sink.
God guided the Pilot, who stood at the Wheel
With eyes on the Future, and heart true as steel.
The Union we love is a monument grand
To Abraham Lincoln—long, long may it stand!*

October, 1930.

Hotel Touraine,
Buffalo, New York.







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ABRAHAM LINCOLN ON THE NIAGARA FRONTIER



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